

# INVASIVE SPECIES FACT SHEET

## Chinese yam, cinnamon vine (*Dioscorea oppositifolia*)

**Description:** Chinese yam is an herbaceous perennial vine in the Yam family (Dioscoreaceae). The vines twine from left to right (counterclockwise) and are angled. They begin growing in April from tuberous roots that can be up to three feet long. The leaf shape is variable but is usually heart-shaped. Leaves are usually opposite but the upper nodes may be alternate. The junction of the petiole and blade is usually a reddish-purple color.



photo by: Jody Shimp

The flowers are greenish-white spikes often having a cinnamon fragrance. The plant flowers from June to July. Chinese yam has not been known to produce fruit in the U.S.

A distinctive feature of Chinese yam is the aerial tuber, or bulbil, which grows in the leaf axis. These tubers resemble miniature potatoes and are usually produced during the summer months. It is from these bulbils that the plant reproduces in the U.S. The bulbils are able to sprout roots when only two weeks old. The bulbils can also remain dormant through the winter and germinate in the spring. Great quantities of bulbils are produced on each vine. The bulbils are easily knocked loose by even slight disturbances to the vines.

**Habitat:** The Chinese yam is native to temperate East Asia, typically found in valleys and on the slopes of hills in China. It was widely cultivated for food in Asia but has been grown mostly as an ornamental plant in the U.S. The plant prefers fertile well-drained soil in full sun or partial shade. It is often found along roadsides, at old homesites and fencerows, and in alluvial soil along streams.

**Distribution:** Chinese yam is widespread throughout the eastern U.S. from Vermont to Georgia and west to Oklahoma and Texas. Its distribution range is unknown in Kentucky. It has been found in Blanton Forest State Nature Preserve (SNP) in Harlan County, Bad Branch SNP in Letcher County, and Jim Scudder SNP in Hardin County. The leaves turn yellow in the fall, making it easy to spot along roadsides. Please contact KSNPC with any confirmed sightings.

**Threat:** Chinese yam forms dense mat-like colonies that are highly invasive. It can infest undisturbed areas, particularly along riparian corridors, and blankets nearby vegetation. It is particularly threatening because of its rapid growth and prolific production of bulbils.

**Control:** Garlon 3A (triclopyr) can be mixed with a surfactant and used as a foliar spray to control Chinese yam. The recommended concentration for foliar application is a 2% aqueous solution with the most effective times of application being from July through October. Cutting of the plant at the base just above the soil surface with the application of Garlon 3A to the stems can be used as an alternate method of control.



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